



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
2013 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
COMPETITIVE GRANT APPLICATION

TODD STAPLES, COMMISSIONER

Contents

I. Projected Timeline of Events	1
II. Statement of Purpose.....	1
III. Eligibility	1
IV. Funding Areas and Priorities	2
<i>A. Food Safety</i>	2
<i>B. Nutrition</i>	2
<i>C. Plant Health</i>	3
<i>D. Value Added Projects and Industry Development</i>	3
<i>E. Marketing</i>	4
V. Funding Parameters, Award Information and Notification	4
VI. Term of Funding or Duration of Projects	5
VII. Proposal Requirements.....	5
VIII. Evaluation and Selection Information.....	5
IX. Reporting Requirement.....	6
X. General Compliance Information.....	6
XI. Deadline for Submission of Responses	6
XII. Contact Information	6

Please read all materials before preparing and submitting the application. Failure to follow the instructions and requirements described in this Request for Proposal may result in the disqualification of the application.

I. Projected Timeline of Events

Application Availability	February 2013
Application Deadline	March 22, 2013
Preliminary Selection	June 2013
Selected Projects submitted to USDA	July 2013
Award Announcements	October 2013
Start Date of Project	December 1, 2013
End Date of Project	December 31, 2014

II. Statement of Purpose

Pursuant to the Texas Agriculture Code, Sections 12.002 and 12.007, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) hereby requests proposals for reimbursable projects designed to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds will be made available to Texas from the Federal 2013 fiscal year budget.

Although the United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS) has not officially released SCBGP funds to the states, TDA anticipates approximately \$1.8 million will be available for Texas projects. Notice of funds and solicitation of proposals by TDA will be published in the Texas Register.

Funding from the USDA-AMS under the SCBGP is contingent upon authorization by the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012 (2012 Farm Bill), or other measure which amends the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) and the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note).

III. Eligibility

Responses will **only** be accepted from producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with, or that promote specialty crops.

- Projects must demonstrate that they enhance the competitiveness of Texas' specialty crop industry.
- Project funds may only be used for activities benefiting specialty crops.
- Projects must benefit more than one individual, institution or organization. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.
- Applications will not be accepted where the primary applicant is an educational institution.
- Producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops may partner with an educational institution; however, the primary applicant must be a producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops.

IV. Funding Areas and Priorities

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery crops (including floriculture). Refer to the following website for a list of common specialty crops (www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp).

TDA encourages organizations to develop projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following five (5) key areas affecting the specialty crop industry. Applicants are responsible for selecting the key area that best fits their project.

Research projects in all focus areas should be applied research and results should be available to producers, processors and/or consumers within one to two years of grant term date. Projects with a large research component will be evaluated on their ability to utilize and document results.

In addition, TDA may choose to use a portion of the funds for projects conducted internally, including, but not limited to, outreach activities, nutrition, regulatory or administration of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Internal projects will also be evaluated in the competitive process.

A. Food Safety

TDA will consider projects that assist production specialty crop agricultural operations in continuing to supply the safest food supply in the world.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Assisting entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices” or “Good Manufacturing Practices”
- § Researching new methods to improve food safety
- § Marketing or outreach to specialty crop producers/distributors regarding new or upcoming food safety requirements

B. Nutrition

TDA will consider projects that improve access and consumption of specialty crops. Ensuring access to healthy foods in underserved low-income areas of Texas is a key strategy to improve public health. Increasing Texans’ access to and consumption of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts is a key strategy to improve human health.

All projects must increase the competitiveness of specialty crops and clearly demonstrate a benefit to the specialty crop industry. TDA will consider projects that integrate human health and nutrition into proposals that also show a direct impact on specialty crops.

- **Food Security**

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increasing participation in under-utilized federal nutrition assistance programs
- § Developing innovative projects that support local and regional food systems
- § Improving access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in ways that foster self-reliance, enhance dignity and assure environmental sustainability

- Healthy Eating

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Increasing consumption of specialty crops among all populations
- § Developing farm-to-fork networks that include schools, worksites, retail and restaurant outlets to connect local agriculture with nearby communities
- § Promoting and/or demonstrating the health benefits of Texas specialty crops

C. Plant Health

TDA will consider proposals that address pests and diseases that affect the production of Texas' specialty crops. This includes research related to the probability and impact of invasive pest, disease and weed threats to specialty crops and research to develop tools to detect, eradicate and control pests and disease. Results should be available to producers, processors or consumers within one to two years of grant term date.

TDA will also consider projects that enhance the conservation or improve the quality of agricultural land, water, habitat and biodiversity, as well as, proposals that address specialty crops' contribution to adaptation and/or mitigation of climate change.

- Plant Health and Pest Challenges

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Enhancing the speed and reliability of detection
- § Developing new tools for eradication
- § Developing plants resistant to pests and disease
- § Evaluating organic and sustainable practices

- Environmental Concerns and Conservation

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Evaluating water use efficiency in regards to current drought conditions and for climate change adaptation
- § Assisting growers to adapt to climate change by conducting research and demonstrating the implementation of strategies where technologies are already available - especially water use efficiency and invasive pest detection, control and management
- § Accelerating implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP) for water conservation and efficiency, including development of a BMP manual for specific specialty crops

D. Value Added Projects and Industry Development

TDA will consider projects that add to the value of specialty crops, or develop new ideas, tools or information that increase the benefit to the industry.

Project examples include, but are not limited to:

- § Providing support for development of value added processing facilities
- § Strengthening specialty crop agricultural career technical education through establishment of certification programs for critical job training

- § Improvement of distribution methods both domestically and internationally
- § Evaluating industry feasibility or development of a new industry
- § Conducting market research of consumer preference
- § Researching a new tool to improve marketability
- § Developing new and improved specialty crop variety/use, technology advancements and growing season extensions in an effort to diversify and strengthen specialty crop production

E. Marketing

TDA will consider projects that improve consumers' knowledge and understanding of specialty crops through education and outreach. Additionally, TDA will consider projects that increase or develop long-term sales, consumption and competitiveness of specialty crop products, including international marketing and trade activities.

- Agriculture Education/Outreach
Project examples include, but are not limited to:
 - § Promoting Texas specialty crops and strengthening the connection between specialty crops and agriculture
 - § Extending science-based information to specialty crop growers and other key stakeholders
 - § Educating consumers about Texas' specialty crops and agriculture
 - § Reconnecting communities with specialty crops production
 - § Educating the public about the identity and threat of invasive species to Texas specialty crops
 - § Promoting/marketing specialty crop certification and/or education program opportunities that further enhance critical job skills
- Market Enhancement and Promotion
Project examples include, but are not limited to:
 - § Conducting statewide promotion and awareness activities of specialty crops
 - § Targeting specialty crop marketing concepts on the unique characteristics of local and regional areas such as culture, geography, history, and types of agricultural production
 - § Developing cooperative marketing and promotions such as cross-menu promotions of specialty crops
 - § Marketing agritourism as it relates to specialty crop
 - § Creating innovative consumer/trade promotions in foreign markets

V. Funding Parameters, Award Information and Notification

- Selected projects will receive funding on a cost reimbursement basis. Funds will not be advanced to grantees. Selected applicants must have the financial capacity to pay all costs up-front.
- Projects may be funded at varying levels depending on the nature of the project.
- Projects must demonstrate strong justification for the requested budget, as well as, the potential for providing significant demonstrable benefits to Texas specialty crops.

- Where more than one (1) proposal on an eligible research topic is acceptable for funding, TDA may request cooperation between grantees or revision/adjustment to a proposal in order to avoid duplication and to realize the maximum benefit to the state.
- TDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals submitted. TDA is under no legal or other obligation to execute a grant on the basis of a response submitted to this RFP. TDA shall not pay for any costs incurred by any entity in responding to this RFP.
- The public announcements and written notifications will be made to all applicants and their affiliated agencies, organizations, or institutions. Favorable decisions will indicate the amount of award, duration of the grant, and any special conditions associated with the project.

VI. Term of Funding or Duration of Projects

- Selected projects will be funded for work that must be completed between December 1, 2013 and December 31, 2014.
- Proposals may be resubmitted in subsequent years to be considered for continued/additional funding.

VII. Proposal Requirements

Each concept proposal may not exceed six (6) pages (not including supporting documents). The acceptable font size is 12 point, and all margins must be 1 inch. Application Form GTBD-121, the blank proposal narrative form and guidance documents can be downloaded from the TDA website under the Grants and Services tab at www.TexasAgriculture.gov.

Grant Proposals --Interested applicants must include all of the following information:

1. **Application Form GTBD-121**
2. **Concept Proposal Narrative**– Must address the following information:
 - a. Project Title
 - b. Partner Organization(s) –list name(s) of organization(s) working on the project
 - c. Abstract
 - d. Project Purpose
 - e. Potential Impact
 - f. Expected Measurable Outcomes
 - g. Project Oversight
 - h. Project Commitment
 - i. Long Term Plan
 - j. Work Plan
 - k. Budget Narrative

VIII. Evaluation and Selection Information

TDA will conduct an administrative review to determine whether the applicant was responsive to the requirements of this RFP.

In addition, a review team including external experts and/or stakeholders will competitively review all proposals, in all categories, to evaluate the projects ability to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Projects that are selected to be included in TDA's state plan must show a direct benefit to specialty crops. Proposals will be scored using the criteria set forth in the [Proposal Evaluation Sheet](#).

IX. Reporting Requirement

Quarterly Performance Reports must be completed by the grantee and submitted to TDA by deadlines stated in the grant agreement. These reports shall be in a narrative format from one (1) to three (3) pages in length and detail the accomplishments of the project objectives for that period.

An *Annual Performance Report* must be completed by the Grant Recipient and submitted to TDA by deadlines stated in the grant agreement. This report shall be in a narrative format and shall address requirements set forth by USDA-AMS.

The *Final Performance Report* is due sixty (60) days after the expiration or termination of the Grant Agreement, whichever occurs first. This report shall be in a narrative format and shall address requirements set forth by USDA-AMS.

Failure to comply with reporting requirements may result in the withholding of requests for reimbursement and/or termination of the award.

X. General Compliance Information

General compliance information may be found on Application Form GTBD-121 on TDA's website, www.TexasAgriculture.gov.

XI. Deadline for Submission of Responses

A complete application with signature must be submitted to TDA by the deadline. Mailed applications must be **POSTMARKED** by Friday, March 22, 2013. Hand-delivered, faxed or scanned applications must be **RECEIVED** by TDA by close of business on Friday, March 22, 2013. Late proposals will not be accepted.

In addition, the narrative must be submitted via email to Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov in a format which allows the text copy function to be operational, such as Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf).

XII. Contact Information

Complete proposal narrative and application with signature must be submitted to:

Physical Address:

Ms. Mindy Fryer, Grants Specialist
Texas Department of Agriculture
1700 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Mailing Address:

Ms. Mindy Fryer, Grants Specialist
Texas Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, Texas 78711

Electronic Versions:

Fax: (888) 223-9048

Email: Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov

For questions regarding submission of the proposal and TDA documentation requirements, please contact Ms. Mindy Weth Fryer, Grants Specialist, at (512) 463-6908 or by email at Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov.

XIII. Texas Public Information Act

Once submitted, all applications shall be deemed to be the property of the TDA and are subject to the Texas Public Information Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 552.